



The Shadow Project

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OREGON'S FIRST "SUPERSENSORY LITERACY SPACE" EQUIPS SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS

A unique, multisensory library created by The Shadow Project makes reading more accessible for children who learn differently

May 19, 2015 (Portland, Ore.) – Imagine you're a child with dyslexia trying to read, but the words won't stay on the page. Or, you have a learning disability and can't focus on your book, like 11-year-old **Fortune**, a Rosa Parks Elementary fifth grader, who has been in special education for the past four years.

"I was bad at reading," said Fortune. "I would get distracted by everything around me and not focus."

Now, an innovative new space designed for children with diverse learning needs is helping children like Fortune concentrate on reading and other classroom tasks, setting an expectation that everyone can read and graduate. Oregon's first SuperSensory Literacy Space, created by Portland nonprofit [The Shadow Project](http://TheShadowProject.org), was unveiled today at Rosa Parks Elementary School in north Portland.

Fortune, who regularly used "SuperSpace" tools during recent state testing, scored well enough that she is "graduating" from special education, her teachers report.

"The SuperSensory Literacy Spaces created by The Shadow Project make literacy more accessible for our students with learning challenges," said Portland Public Schools (PPS) Superintendent **Carole Smith**. "I'm thankful The Shadow Project is part of our Read Together initiative."

One of PPS' top three priorities is ensuring that all students read well by the end of third grade. The PPS [Read Together](http://ReadTogether.org) initiative has brought together six reading and family organizations to provide students at five pilot schools with intensive, wrap-around literacy services.

A State Crisis

More than 75,000 children in Oregon receive special education services. Currently, two-thirds of the state's third graders with disabilities such as dyslexia, ADHD, autism, and other learning disabilities do not meet reading benchmarks, quadrupling their risk of school drop out. Only half of Oregon students with disabilities graduate from high school on time.

Last week, a newly released [national report](#) labeled Oregon a “laggard” for its overall graduation rates, calling out the state for its need “to do better by its special education students.” The report estimates that 85 to 90 percent of special education students can meet regular diploma requirements with the right supports.

“Special education teachers tell us they’re hungry for classroom libraries with materials that make reading more accessible and enjoyable for their students,” said **Christy Scattarella**, founder and executive director of The Shadow Project. “We have kids who do not read in the traditional way. They may “read” with their ears, need the freedom to move around, or crave tools that soothe and calm them so they can focus. They have tenacity and they have courage. We need to do right by these remarkable children.”

What’s In a SuperSensory Literacy Space?

The Shadow Project’s unique, compact, multisensory libraries include:

- * More than 200 high-interest, highly-readable, multicultural, and five-piece book sets for group lesson plans;
- * Access to Learning Ally, an audio library with more than 80,000 titles;
- * A tablet and accessories;
- * Multisensory tools to calm and/or stimulate students, including fidgets, kinetic sand, weighted lap pads, and nubby-surfaced cushions.

Research indicates that providing multisensory elements in special education classrooms increases student engagement and on-task behaviors. A recent study found that [fidgeting](#) improves school performance for children with ADHD.

Just ask Fortune. During recent state testing, she used fidgets, a vibrating pillow, and earphones in the SuperSensory Literacy Space to relieve stress and improve concentration.

“The pillow massages my legs when it vibrates to help me focus,” said Fortune, who loves reading *Junie B. Jones* and *Captain Underpants* books. “The space is cool.”

Rosa Special Education Teacher **Kim Giarelli** said she is proud of Fortune for successfully utilizing the strategies she has been given. “The learning difficulty is still there, but she now has the confidence to know what she needs to read with focus.” Giarelli said that Fortune’s recent test scores were high enough that she no longer requires special education services. “Fortune now has more confidence in herself and in knowing what she needs to achieve,” she said.

About The Shadow Project

The Shadow Project is Oregon’s only nonprofit that partners with special education teachers to close the achievement gap that separates children with disabilities from their peers. Vetted by the Harvard Business School Association of Oregon, The Shadow Project serves 1,500 children from kindergarten through eighth grade in 34 schools in Portland, East Multnomah and Yamhill Counties, and Hillsboro.

The Shadow Project is installing a SuperSensory Literacy Space at Bridger Elementary, another of the five pilot schools selected, and will equip eight additional schools next academic year. Scattarella said she hopes to collaborate with district and state education leaders to eventually make the spaces available statewide.